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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 000530

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SUBJECT: NIS DEPUTY DIRECTOR KIM SOOK ON DPRK LAUNCH AND
BEYOND

Classified By: POL M/C Joseph Y. Yun. Reasons 1.4(b/d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The Ambassador and the Special Advisor discussed DPRK launch assessments, the state of the Six-Party Talks, the status of the South Korean detained in Kaesong, and ROK policy toward North Korea with ROK National Intelligence Service (NIS) First Deputy Director Kim Sook over lunch March 31. Former Six-Party negotiator Kim questioned whether the timing was right for a 6PT working group meeting given the apparently imminent missile launch by North Korea. China was also ambivalent about the WG idea. NIS assigned growing credence to the possibility that the DPRK had "pre-planned" incidents leading to the detention of two American journalists on the North Korea-China border and now a South Korean citizen in Kaesong; Pyongyang appeared to be "gathering chits" for political and diplomatic use following the launch. Kim Jong-il had returned to smoking and possibly drinking; as NIS Director Won Sei-hoon had commented to the Ambassador in an earlier meeting, Chang Song-taek would be the key figure in any succession. While President Lee Myung-bak continued to stress the importance of dialogue with the North, there would be no inter-Korean breakthroughs as long as a missile launch was in the offing; the ROKG had in fact informed Pyongyang that it would begin responding to the North's anti-Lee Administration rhetoric after April 1, though in practice it would likely wait until after the launch. Kim said that former President Kim Dae-jung's criticism of Lee Myung-bak was "annoying"; the Lee Administration's objectives as they concerned North Korea were to divest the ROK of its previous "pro-North" policy bent and "regain" the trust of the U.S. on DPRK matters. END SUMMARY.

Post-Launch "Cooling Period" Before Working Group Meeting

12. (C) Named to the second highest ranking position in the NIS February 27, South Korea's former chief Six-Party Talks negotiator Kim Sook told the Ambassador on March 31 that a "cooling period" would need to follow the presumed North Korean launch before another Six-Party heads of delegation or working group meeting. At present, North Korea was "not in the mood" for such a meeting. Wondering out loud how the Japanese viewed the prospects for a working group meeting, Kim stated that South Korea did not oppose the idea, but the timing should be realistic and go hand-in-hand with dissuading North Korea from launching a Taepo Dong-2.

13. (C) China, on the other hand, was ambivalent about the working group idea, Kim said. Beijing had been frustrated in its attempts to convince North Korea not to launch a missile and probably felt it had lost face.

14. (C) Kim understood the idea of a working group meeting was part of Special Representative Bosworth's first effort to engage with North Korea. While South Korea wanted to support Ambassador Bosworth's efforts, the United States needed to understand the timing nuances. Proposing a working group at the present point in time would convey the impression that we were reducing pressure on North Korea.

Arrests, Detentions "Pre-Planned"?

15. (C) The South Korean Hyundai Asan employee (age 44) North Korean officials had arrested in Kaesong, Kim said, was likely in Kaesong city now, not the Kaesong Industrial Complex. North Korea would likely bring charges against him for trying to persuade a female North Korean employee to "cooperate in an inappropriate manner." Linking the Kaesong arrest with the mid-March arrests of two U.S. journalists on the China-North Korea border, Kim said that more and more, NIS viewed these incidents as "pre-planned." The journalists could potentially be charged with espionage under North Korea's anti-hostility law, Kim noted. A conviction carried a five to ten year sentence, but it was unlikely that the journalists would serve it. Rather, NIS analysts believed that the North Koreans were "gathering chits" for political and diplomatic use in the aftermath of a missile launch.

Chang Song-taek and Succession

16. (C) Kim noted that Kim Jong-il had returned to smoking and possibly drinking. He further echoed previous comments to the Ambassador by NIS Director Won Sei-hoon that Korea Workers Party Administrative Department head Chang Song-taek would be a key figure in any succession; Chang would probably act as a "regent" to Kim Jong-il's third son Kim Jong-un, who was probably being belatedly prepared to be his successor.

Food Aid, Lee Administration Pyongyang Policy

17. (C) ROK President Lee Myung-bak stressed the importance of dialogue with the North, Kim said, but any talks would have to wait given the impending missile launch dates. By spring or summer North Korea would have to return to the international community for more food aid. Pyongyang had refused earlier food aid offers partly because it had planned all along to increase tensions and then return with larger food demands. Even while North Korea refused food aid, it had sent its agents to Southeast Asia to buy food on credit, though they had met with little success.

18. (C) The ROKG had heretofore refrained from responding to the rhetorical invective directed at the Lee Administration, but had decided, and informed the DPRK, that after April 1, it would respond in kind. In practice, however, Seoul would likely wait until after a missile launch.

Kim Dae-jung and the "Left"

19. (C) The Ambassador asked about South Korean public attitudes toward LMB's North Korea policy. Kim stated that the government presently enjoyed majority support on North Korea issues. Former President Kim Dae-jung had recently renewed his criticism of Lee Myung-bak's policies, saying that South Korea should not join the Proliferation Security Initiative, and advocating that the ROK give up the Northern Limit Line so as not to provoke North Korea; Kim said he wished that former Korean presidents behaved more like former American presidents, and stayed silent on policy matters. A former president was parroting North Korea's

political line, he said, and the whole situation was very "annoying."

¶10. (C) The Lee Administration has two objectives as far as its North Korea policy is concerned, Kim continued. First, it wanted South Korea to "regain its national identity" by divesting itself of the ROKG's previous "pro-North" policy bent. Second, it was imperative that the Lee government "regain" mutual trust with the United States on North Korea.

NIS Launch Assessment

¶11. (C) Asked by the Ambassador about the NIS assessment of the chances of a successful North Korean missile launch, Kim said, "My analysts tell me that given Iran's successful launch of a similar missile -- albeit a two-stage version -- they have greater confidence in North Korea's ability and believe that North Korea is more confident in its ability to carry out a successful launch."

Encryption

¶12. (C) The Ambassador raised the ARIA issue with Kim, and noted our concerns about the ROKG's plans to introduce a new Korean encryption standard called "ARIA" for government-to-government Internet telephony. She added that NIS was part of the ROKG task force working on this issue. Kim said that he was unfamiliar with the issue but would look into it.
STEPHENS